

SACRAMENTO BUSINESS JOURNAL

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(PR)ACTICALLY SPEAKING: Turn Great Recession to your advantage
Tailor marketing efforts for customers looking to cut costs

Friday, September 17, 2010

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Lots of businesses are having a hard time adjusting to the new consumer attitudes and values that have come about since the beginning of this Great Recession. Sales are down and it's hard to recover.

Yet others are thriving and beating the odds. What's their secret?

They just might be embracing the economy rather than cursing it. Those who take an inevitable situation and discover a way to make the most of it are the ones who succeed.

Whatever business you're in, there's a way to find your niche and tailor your marketing efforts to work for you, despite tough times.

PROMOTIONAL OFFERS

Recently, several businesses in the Sacramento region have been advertising "Furlough Friday" specials, and it's a great promotion. Ideas like this capitalize on issues that consumers are dealing with and turn a negative into a positive. Try other promotions that are unique or differ from your routine.

- **Coupons.** While coupons may be a simple, old-fashioned idea, they work for getting people through the door. Offer coupons at your front counter, on your website or social networking page or have them published in a community or special interest publication.

- **Partnerships.** Team up with other businesses in your neighborhood that offer complementary services or products to create appealing customer deals. For example, a restaurant may offer a dinner discount, and as an added bonus the ice cream shop across the street may offer a free dessert when you show your receipt from the restaurant. The partnership between these two businesses is mutually beneficial and offers the customer an attractive deal.

- **Events.** Host a special event. Almost any type of business can think of something to celebrate or promote. A sports store could invite athletes to be fitted for the correct shoe. A theater could show a free documentary that supports a worthwhile cause. The possibilities are endless. While events may seem like an unnecessary and frivolous expense, they will likely turn a profit. Athletes who are fitted for shoes will surely buy some, and

theatergoers will purchase snacks as they watch their free film.

- **Rewards programs.** Many of my favorite companies have rewards cards for "buy five, get one free" and comparable incentives. Consider a similar program with rewards cards to encourage customer loyalty and to give them a reason to choose you over competitors.

- **Strategic timing.** You have probably noticed that business is slow during certain times of the year — this is normal, yet different for every business. To encourage spending during down seasons, have special sales or promotions specifically offered at those times.

LOW-COST PUBLICITY

Public relations is a fantastic way to get your company in the public eye. PR is different than marketing in that you don't pay for it. Marketing involves paid advertising and sponsorships, but PR utilizes relationships — with customers, other businesses and the media — to create a positive reputation. Clients often ask me to get maximum exposure for minimum funds expended. Some tactics we often implement include:

- **E-mail newsletters.** To keep in contact with current and potential customers, a newsletter is often

beneficial. Electronic newsletters are less expensive and more environmentally-friendly, so organizations are switching to this format rapidly.

- **Media relations.** Getting news coverage for your business is one of the most affordable and effective ways to enhance its reputation. Information from the media is considered more trustworthy than any other PR tactic. Try to come up

with a unique, newsworthy angle, write a news release and pitch it!

- **Social media.** Create a Facebook business page, Twitter account and/or blog for your business. An online presence is necessary to connect with the public and create a lasting relationship.

Hiring a public relations agency to coordinate these new aspects of your strategy can help you to accomplish

your goals in a faster and more effective manner. Even if you are low on budget, experienced professionals will be able to create a simple marketing plan that you can build off of and implement yourself. The changes in consumer spending over the past few years don't have to signal the end of your profitable business. It will take adjustments to your marketing mix, but it's possible to prosper and expand if you adjust appropriately.

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